1. What are the main challenges that young people in your country face in accessing digital education? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.

Nigeria, a country in the West Africa region with its average population living below one dollar per day for a family of 6 has its average population living in abject poverty. With this situation, young people, mostly in rural areas have no financial capacity to access digital tools and resources to access digital education. There is no financial strength to purchase digital tools ranging from data, browsing phones, not to talk of a computer. The few that could get a hold of a browsing phone are faced with very poor or no internet service.

Similarly, the misconception among the elderly uneducated people in Nigeria, majorly among those in the rural communities is that, any young person working on a computer often is into internet fraud which is generally termed as ‘yahoo yahoo’ in Nigeria. This profiling has done much harm and has been a militating factor to young persons in accessing digital education. There is no believe in digital education by parents, hence no motivation or opportunity to explore same, parents will rather force these young people to hawk for them to ‘wasting time’ on a computer with no understanding of what it can bring. Some parents even go as far as punishing their children if found visiting elderly ones or mates with computers.

To further substantiate this, in 2023, our organization launched a Research Document on Girl Child Education while assessing issues militating girl-child education development in Kwara state, Nigeria. Our research revealed that 58.4% of these children (though mostly girls as result of our research focus) hawks daily to assist their parents financially without access to time to learn digital skills.

School Curriculum; despite frequent calls on social media and some other platforms, the government is yet to inculcate digital education or skills into the syllabus of primary and secondary school. If digital education is added into the syllabus, it will enhance access to it especially by young persons in the rural or socially disadvantaged communities. In achieving this however, there is need for a total overhaul of teachers in term of digital skills training, as many teachers in government owned schools do not have access to it nor understand what it entails. So, it will be comical to include same into the school’s curriculum without training the teachers who are deem to pass the knowledge down to the students.

1. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that digital education is accessible and promoted among young people? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes directed at ensuring young people’s universal access to digital education.

On policy, there is the National Digital Learning Policy (Digital Policy) by the Federal Ministry of Education which was presented in May 2023 which was built upon some existing policy and strategy documents like the National IT Policy, National Information Technology Education Framework, ICT in Education Policy, among others. The Digital policy was set forth to serve as a framework to harness the potential of digital learning and ensure its effective implementation across Nigeria’s diverse educational landscape. The Policy revolves around four key areas, viz;

* 1. To bridge the digital divide and reach underserved communities
  2. Seeks to create an innovative digital learning ecosystem, fostering local skills development and sustainable systems development
  3. Emphasizes the availability and production of quality digital content as a cornerstone of digital learning sustainability
  4. Recognizes the pivotal role of teachers and aims to develop clear pathways for their capacity development.

The values of the policy are guided by Inquisitiveness, Innovation and Inclusion.

Recently, the Nigeria Government through the Federal Ministry of Communication, Innovation and Digital Economy, in partnership with National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), introduced the 3 Million Technical Talent Program (3MTT) which is a programme aimed at building Nigeria’s technical talent backbone to power the digital economy of Nigeria. The first phase of the programme, which is ongoing is being executed as a fellowship model whereby young persons with interest in specific skills like software development, UI/UX Design, Data analysis & Visualization, Animation, AI/Machine Learning, Cyber security, Game Development, among many others were selected upon application, and the government fund the cost of their training with training providers accepted into the programme.

Another laudable effort of the Nigeria Government is the launching of the Nigeria Learning Passport (NLP) which was a partnership project between UNICEF and the Federal Ministry of Education in 2022. It is an online mobile digital learning platform powered by Microsoft to enable continuous access to over 15,000 curriculum learning and training materials for learners, teachers and parents in rural communities of the North East which has constantly been ravaged by attacks from bandits thereby disrupting learning in the school. This platform also offers offline access to combat areas with poor or no internet network. This has helped students, teachers and parents greatly with over 5,002 respondents in a satisfaction survey conducted attesting to its help, especially in tha areas of digital education. To this end, 780 schools in hard-to-areas and rural schools were given 13,500 tablets, 1,000 smart rechargeable projectors, and 780 Airtel internet routers and data cost was removed through the whitelisting of NLP on an Airtel SIM card. It is worthy of mention again that the project was carried out by UNICEF with partnership with the Federal Ministry of Education.

However, these are not enough as it is like a drop of water into an ocean, there are thousands of young persons in the rural communities that are still left behind, the percentage of those that can access any of the above are very minute compared to those that have access or benefit.

In corroborating the above vis a vis our organization’s contribution, our Global Director in 2022 joined team of speakers to speak at a Webinar facilitated by dRPC on school safety and digital alternatives to education in Nigeria which recommendations proffered served as basis to subsequent policies of government.

1. What step is the Government taking to ensure that young people can realize their human rights online in a safe, empowering, and inclusive way?

In December 2023, the Nigeria House of Representatives passed the second reading of the bill titled ‘Child Online Access Protection Act, 2023’ which is a Bill with a framework to prevent and address the harms caused by online abuse and illegal online content on children. The Bill contains penalties for online abusers of children and also outlines what constitutes online abuse or threats to children and young persons. The Bill also mandates Internet service providers to block access to materials depicting violent conduct while also restricting contents that may impact children negatively. If this proposed law is eventually signed into law, it will significantly help young people to be safe online while safeguarding their human rights regardless of region, gender, religion or location.

Also, the government has used many programs to enlighten young people on the significance of safeguarding their human rights online while watching out for abusers. One of such programs is the Teen Ambassador Foundation’s summer program held in FCT, Abuja where the Head of Enforcement and Regulation, Nigerian Data Protection Commission (NDPC) warned teenagers against sharing personal information online.

Also, our organization, Brain Builders Youth Development Initiative (BBYDI) in preparation for the Safer Internet Day 2024 is organizing a sensitization, training, protective measures against internet threat and bullying for secondary school students with the theme ‘Inspiring Change; *Making a Difference, Managing Influence, and Navigating Change Online*’ The event has line of experts that will be brought in to enlighten secondary school students on cyber bullying, Digital rights and protective laws, online sexual abuse and harassment, online blackmailing, among others.

1. What are the main gaps and challenges to young people’s protection from online threats in law, policy, and practice in your country and the impacts on young people’s human rights? Please consider the specific situation of marginalized young people and those in vulnerable situations in your response.

In Nigeria, there is no specific law on the protection of young persons against online threats, this is one of the major challenges and its impact is grave. The fact that there is no definite legal protection, it leaves them vulnerable. The existing laws are not explicit which thus creates a lacuna in accessing adequate protection against online threats.

In term of practice, most young people are not aware that their human rights extend to online activities and engagements. This is why online threats may continue to thrive as most young people believes that anything that happens online stay or remain there. This is mostly hinged upon the anonymity of most online users and the belief that they cannot be identified even if one wants to report to appropriate authority. Thus, there is lack of awareness; this is very peculiar to those in rural communities. This is one of the reasons for our Safer Internet Day event to enlighten young persons on their online rights and how same can be duly protected.

Another key hindrance is the bureaucracy or bottlenecks in the justice system. Accessing justice and thoroughness in carrying out investigations when there is a report is worrisome, coupled with lack of proximity in the case of the rural dwellers.

1. What steps is the Government taking to ensure that young people are protected from online threats? Please provide examples of specific laws and regulations, measures, policies, and programmes.

In protecting young people against online threats online, one core point is that, there is neither specific law nor single handedly a statute protecting the interest of online users (young persons) in Nigeria. However, there are laws wherein we can infer an implied protection against online threats. Firstly, section 37 of the 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides that the privacy of every citizen which either in their homes, outside, telephone conversations, and telegraphic communications are guaranteed and protected. Here, protection of online users against threats can be inferred.

Equally, NITDA Act, 2007 is an Act that confers on Nigerian users their right to privacy in their communications and online platforms while putting into consideration privacy issues when sharing user’s data. There is also the NDP Regulation (2019) which is mainly to safeguard the rights of natural persons to data privacy, safe conduct for transactions which involves exchange of personal data, and to **prevent manipulation of personal data**. Cybercrime Act of 2015 can also come under this purview as section 19 of this Act mandates the protection of customers’ data against unlawful interception or access. There is also the Data Protection Act, 2023 which expands the protection accorded to children and persons lacking legal capacity, it includes provisions relating to specific consent requirements for children and requires controllers and processors to implement consent verification mechanisms.